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**Minutes from the Fullabrook wind turbine noise breaches public meeting**

**Tuesday 24 February, 6pm, The Ilfracombe Centre**

Panel members (l to r):

* Andy Cole, Lead Officer, Environmental Protection, North Devon Council (AC)
* Claire Holm, Customer and Corporate Communications Manager, North Devon Council (CH)
* Jeremy Mann, Head of Environmental Health and Housing, North Devon Council (JM)
* Majella McCarron, Stakeholder Manager, ESB (MM)
* Ian Whitehead, GB Windfarm Manager, ESB (IW)

**Jeremy Mann** introduced the panel to the audience and introduced the three North Devon Council councilors. Cllr Derrick Spear, Cllr Malcolm Wilkinson and Cllr Joe Tucker.

**Andy Cole** took the audience through some key dates in relation to the turbines:

* August 2011 – the turbines first starting supplying electricity to the grid
* January 2012 – start of noise monitoring to ensure compliance with planning conditions
* October 2014 – NDC receives confirmation the turbines were breaching noise levels within the planning conditions
* NDC writes to ESB to ask them what action they are going to take to meet the conditions and requests a response by 19 December 2014
* ESB respond to the council on 10 December 2014 agreeing to undertake further works to mitigate against the noise and subsequent noise monitoring
* The mitigating action was due to be completed by 23 January 2015 but was actually completed by 20 January 2015
* Noise monitoring was due to start next week
* The results were anticipated to be with the council in October to verify, ready to release to the public hopefully in November although it is weather dependent as monitoring needed to be carried out on all relevant turbines in all weather conditions

**Ian Whitehead** outlined what mitigating actions ESB had taken in January. He explained that in certain conditions, the angle of the blades of the relevant turbines is automatically adjusted to slow them down and the turbines can even be turned off completely. This is all controlled by specialist software in Denmark which cannot be tampered with at a local level.

A member of the audience commented he felt the turbines were still just as noisy.

**IW** explained we won’t know the effects of the mitigation until the noise monitoring is carried out. He said ESB were doing everything they could to comply with the planning conditions.

A member of the audience said he felt that the timing of the monitoring was wrong.

**AC** explained that two independent, expert noise consultants will ensure the monitoring captures all weather conditions. He was unaware of previous allegations that autumn/winter were the worst months for the noise and will pass these concerns from the residents onto the consultants.

Question from the audience: When the angle of the blades is changed, does it stay in that position permanently?

**IW:** No the software can alter the angle of the blade whenever the weather conditions require it to

Question from the audience: How many days have the turbines actually been stopped?

**IW:** Doesn’t have that information but anecdotally, he thinks one has been stopped completely as a result of the mitigating action

**JM** suggested that ESB could produce a programme of the control measures that have taken place to see how they have worked in practice

Question from the audience: Have you had to carry out mitigation on any of you other sites?

**MM:** No – this is the first time. They knew there would be noise here, hence the planning conditions. The tonal noise was an unknown unknown to them and is the first time is has been identified in the 85 years of the Irish-government owned business. They feel in a really awkward place and really want to solve the problems.

Question from the audience: Are all the turbines being monitored?

**IW:** No, just the ones that are affecting the residents – about eight. ESB have taken professional advice and can only go with what the experts have advised and they are acting on their recommendations which selected these eight turbines to monitor.

**JM** asked ESB to identify which ones were being monitored which they agreed to do.

Question from the audience: Is there a cumulative effect?

**AC:** We can’t absolutely confirm this without having the reports in front of us to check but wed expect this had been looked at. It’s exceedingly unlikely that such expert acoustic specialists would not have looked at it on a site like this but we will check.

Question from the audience: Are ESB’s other sites near residential properties?

**MM:** Yes, there are a variety of sites but all of a similar nature.

Question from the audience: Does this mitigation address the tonal noise issue?

**IW:** Yes, it is solely to deal with the tonal noise

Question from the audience: How is it measured?

**AC:** Through frequency analysis. The tonal element is a low frequency and also incurs a ‘penalty’ when assessing noise and it’s applying the penalty that has led to the non-compliance.

Question from the audience: How many properties are being monitored and is it the same ones that were measured before?

**AC:** Yes it’s the same ones. Of the original properties that were being monitored, seven are still experiencing non-compliance. Andy explained he’d written to tall the properties to explain when the monitoring would commence but will also write to all of those that were originally monitored but where the noise levels are now compliant.

Question from the audience: Which sites are being monitored?

**AC:** Yes: Binalong, Burland, Metcombe, Northleigh, Patsford, Halsinger and Beara.

Question from the audience: If a property is not being monitored, is it compliant?

**AC:** Theoretically yes, as the premises where monitoring is being undertaken from have been determined by our and ESB’s acoustic consultant as being ‘representative’ of the community - in accordance with the technical guidance – and worse case scenario locations. We couldn’t monitor it at all the properties. The objective is to achieve planning compliance and the acoustic experts say that the properties they have picked are representative for all the affected properties.

Question from the audience: A business causing this problem would be shut down – why not just take the offending turbines down?

**JM:** In any situation, you have to monitor the noise first and allow any mitigating action to take place. We’ve been given a commitment from ESB to secure compliance but we won’t speculate on any potential future regulatory action.

Question from the audience: The mitigation is not sufficient on only eight turbines.

**MM:** We are confident this work will make the site compliant as it has been based on the recommendations of two acoustic experts.

**JM:** We will feed back on the adequacy of the monitoring to provide reassurance to the residents.

**AC:** The first noise monitoring exercise was carried out at 12 properties. The mitigating actions recommended by our acoustic experts secured compliance at five of those sites so we’re confident this work will achieve the desired results. The experts have picked properties that are ‘worse case scenario’.

**Cllr Joe Tucker:** How many of the 22 turbines have been adjusted?

**IW:** Around 8 but more were adjusted in the early days to mitigate against broadband noise.

**Cllr Derrick Spear:** Do we know which turbines are the biggest culprits? And just because there is planning compliance doesn’t mean there isn’t still a problem.

**JM:** We appreciate there is a need for more clarity about what has happened so far and what will happen in the future and we are happy to provide that.

Question from the audience: Why does ESB carry out the noise monitoring, not NDC?

**AC:** The process is that the operators have to prove to us that they are compliant, not the other what around but our own independent consultant works closely with the operator’s consultant to agree the mitigation strategy to ensure it is technically accurate and robust enough for us to be able to accept

Question from the audience: Why not get two completely independent consultants to give two separate opinions?

**AC:** We have every confidence in our consultant’s expertise and opinion so it isn’t necessary. We have no reason to question the integrity of the noise monitoring.

**JM:** Andy will look at the appropriateness of additional check noise monitoring which may be able to be undertaken by NDC Officers.

Question from the audience: Can we know which five properties are now compliant?

**AC:** Yes. And noise monitoring equipment will be installed next week dependent on residents’ availability.

Question from the audience: Why isn’t Mr. Williams’ house being monitored?

**JM:** We will seek reassurance that the properties being monitored are in the appropriate place, suffering from the most acute problems.

**AC:** The reports are available on our website but they are very technical so we will do a summary for residents.

Question from the audience: We are nowhere near resolving the issue and people aren’t being kept informed.

**JM:** We are committed to keeping residents better informed and will be carrying out further public meetings. We know we need to substantiate some of the information given tonight.

Question from the audience (West Down Parish Councillor): There have been problems with lightning storms affecting lots of local peoples’ modems and computers. They have carried out some research into how wind turbines can attract and even create lightning.

**IW:** Not heard of this happening before but will contact the manufacturers for information.

**JM** asked the lady to supply us with the information and research she had.

Question from the audience: Is night flicker monitored?

**IW:** We have put light mitigation on some turbines and they would need times and dates of light flicker to mitigate against it.

**Cllr Joe Tucker:** This is the danger of taking planning decisions out of the hands of North Devon Council. This decision was made in Whitehall and left us with a hornets’ nest. NDC is doing all it can in times of limited resources and the blame cannot be laid on the council.

**JM:** We don’t want to give false expectations on reaching compliance. We have agreed to provide more information and we will look into the effectiveness of the monitoring.

Question from the audience: Compliance may not mean peoples’ lives are no longer affected. Once the planning conditions are met, will you wash your hands of it?

**JM:** There are two separate regulatory functions here. One is to achieve planning compliance and one is to address noise nuisance. We need to achieve planning compliance first and will only then begin to look at noise nuisance if applicable.

**JM** asked the audience when they would like the next meeting. The consensus was mid-way through the monitoring which would be around July 2015. A date will be arranged.

**MEETING CLOSED**